



Congressman Tim Ryan

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Constituent Update

October 31, 2003

"Picture of the Week"

In Search of Real Prescription Drug Coverage

Over the past few months I have received hundreds of calls and letters from constituents worried about Medicare and prescription drug coverage. Deluged with an advertising campaign funded by the pharmaceutical industry, callers insist on the need to pass a meaningful benefit at the same time that they ask, "Will my Medicare be privatized?" and "Will my employer drop my coverage if this legislation is passed?" Both are very good questions. The advertisements are misleading.

The Republican sponsored Health Savings and Affordability Act which passed the House of Representatives last July with one vote—I did not vote in favor of this bill—does not give seniors the option of selecting a prescription drug benefit under traditional Medicare. If adopted, the House bill stipulates that by 2010 seniors will be forced into private medical insurance plans; in 2006 traditional Medicare will be cut into 10 or more regional plans and then will be converted into a voucher program by 2010. For the first time since 1965, there will not be a defined national health benefit under Medicare.

The prescription drug benefit provisions of the bill—which commercials are billing as the answer seniors are looking for—are complicated, inadequate and simply unfair. Beneficiaries would pay the first \$3,500 of \$5,000 drug costs before the *comprehensive* coverage begins. Under the House-passed proposal, seniors pay the first \$250 and then pay 20% of drug costs up to \$2,000. After that they would have no coverage from \$2,000 to \$4,900. Worse yet, during this time of *no coverage*, seniors will still pay their monthly premium. This prescription drug proposal is not the answer.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has concluded that if either the House or Senate Medicare bills are adopted about one-third of employers who are currently providing retiree prescription drug benefits will discontinue coverage. According to a study prepared by Emory University, this will affect 1,703,000 Ohioans. Unfortunately, on October 15th, minority efforts to protect employer coverage were voted down.

The commercials aim to convince seniors that the Health Savings and Affordability Act or the similar Senate passed bill will be their answer to insurmountable drug costs. Upon examining this legislation it is clear to me that if passed it will make a lot of money for drug companies—the ones paying for the advertisements—while ultimately making things worse for those in need. GOP leaders in the House and Senate have announced their intention to have a Prescription Drug bill for the President to sign by the end of this year. I would support any legislation that would provide a meaningful benefit to help curb the mounting costs of prescription drugs. But I simply cannot support efforts that will make things worse.



September 28, 2003: Congressman Ryan speaks at the Small Business Committee's review of the state of manufacturing in the United States.

Ryan Brings Community Leaders Together to Study Mahoning Valley Speedway

Imagine a state of the art indoor racetrack facility with a 3/4 mile enclosed track with a seating capacity of 120,000. In addition to races, imagine tradeshows, research and development on state of the art automobiles and equipment, concerts and other activities. There has been speculation that such a project could mean more than \$80 million annually in jobs and other investments in the Mahoning Valley if Brant Motorsports of Morgantown, WV is successful in its efforts to build such a facility near the Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport.

For the last four years, Brant has invested \$5 million in engineering, design and feasibility studies for the project. They are convinced of the project's viability, and an independent review of marketing data agrees. This review, conducted by the Western Reserve Port Authority, concluded that the area is well suited for the project as "one of the last highly populated areas of the US that does not have a major speedway that can host Tier I and Tier II racing events."

This is only one study. To examine both the positive and negative aspects of Brant's proposal I have worked to assemble a group of business and community leaders. Chaired by Rick Schiraldi, a partner with the accounting firm Cohen and Company, the task force will evaluate the project and weigh its associated opportunities and costs. With manufacturing jobs moving to other countries, this project could help strengthen and diversify our local economy. While many people claim that the project is too large or costly to build, the racetrack may be a way for us to improve the quality of life for valley residents. I look forward to working with the task force and seeing its recommendations, it is only with all of the information that we can ultimately decide what is best for the Mahoning Valley.

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